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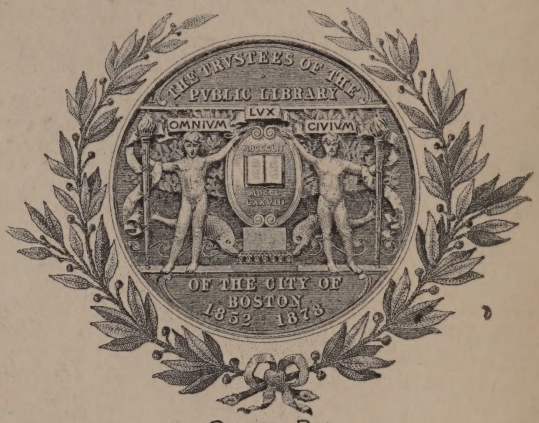

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Edward J. H. O'Brien.

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AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY

EDWARD J. H. O'BRIEN

BOSTON COLLEGE

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AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY

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In the year 1620, a small octavo volume of anonymous essays appeared in London. The title-page reads as follows:

HORAE SUBSECIVAE.

OBSERVATIONS

AND

DISCOURSES.

LONDON,

Printed for Edward Blount, and are to be sold at his shop in Pauls Churchyard, at the signe of the Black Beare.

1620.

This little book bears no external mark of its authorship, yet I think that a careful reading of its contents clearly reveals the creator whose identity is masked. A short address to the reader by Edward Blount, the publisher, follows the title page, but gives no clue other than a denial by Blount of any share in the work. "I take not upon mee," he says, "to write either in the praise, or discommendation of this Booke; it belongs not unto me; but now it is abroad, must wholly bee submitted to your iudgment and censure. . . . . The Author of this Booke I know not; but by chance hearing that a friend of mine had some such papers in his hand, and having heard them commended, I was curious to see and reade them over; and in my opinion (which was also confirmed by others, iudidicious and learned) supposed if I could get the Copie, they would be welcome abroad. My friends courtesie bestowed it freely upon me, and my endevour to give you contentment caused mee to put it in print."

So much for Blount's denial that he wrote the book. He goes on to say: "The Booke, you see, is of mixt matter, by the way of observations, or Essays, and Discourses." Here we have a use of the word "essays," which was previously to be found only in Bacon and Montaigne. Bacon and this anonymous writer, then, are the only men of their time to use this word in the sense of brief dissertations on some theme of manners or morals.

The book consists of twelve "Observations" or Essays, and four "Discourses." The titles of the twelve Essays suggest those

of another contemporary writer. Thus, we have essays here, "Of Arrogance," "Of Ambition," "Of Affectation," "Of Detraction," "Of Selfe-will," "Of Masters and Servants," "Of Expences," "Of Visitations," "Of Death," "Of a Country Life," "Of Religion," "Of Reading History." Several of these titles are found in the Essays of Bacon, while all of these subjects are treated by him there or elsewhere in more or less detail.

It may be worth recalling the dates of publication of Bacon's Essays. The *Editio Princeps* appeared in 1597, and was reissued in the following year. This edition contained ten essays, including papers, entitled "Of Followers and Friends," "Of Expense," and "Of Honor and Reputation." A new edition appeared in 1612, and contained thirty new essays, including papers, entitled "Of Seeming Wise," "Of Ambition," "Of Death," and "Of Religion." At last, in 1625, the final English text appeared with eighteen new essays. The "Horae Subsecivae" was published, as I have said, in 1620, eight years after the first revision of Bacon's Essays, and five years before the second. It is well that this order should be kept in mind.

The "Horae Subsecivae" opens with an essay "Of Arrogance." "Arrogance," the author says, "is the assuming to a man's selfe, the Titles of Virtue, Learning, Honour, Riches, or the like, without the possession, or (if with the possession) without the evidence." The author quotes inaccurately from the Latin, much as Bacon does, and then proceeds to translate his quotations. He illustrates his argument with many historical allusions, as, for instance, to Cincinnatus called to be dictator. He recalls a fable, and puts his own fanciful construction on it much as Bacon does. He is fond of aphorisms, and they sound to us like those of the Lord Chancellor. Listen to this, for example: "Such a nature can hardly hold friendship, that admitteth not the Piller thereof, which is *Parity*, but thinks himself superior to all, if not in Fortune (at which he therefore grudges, taunts her with her blindnesse, and rayles at her with *Apothegmes*), yet in all other worth and desert." Bacon realises the principle of Parity, and tells how princes craving friendship had found it necessary to elevate a subject nearly to their own estate.

Our parallel between Bacon and this unknown author becomes most striking when we come to the essay "Of Ambition," for here we have a similar essay by Bacon with which we may compare it. Here again we find many aphorisms, astonishing us with their pregnant meaning, and pointing unmistakably to the name of their author. We find a fondness for curious simile, a love of balance, inaccurate quotation of Scripture, and many other Baconian characteristics. Let me quote two or three passages: "*Phauorinus*, speaking of these kind of men, said they were eyther ridiculous, or hatefull, or miserable. Aspiring ambitiously to places beyond their worth makes them scorned: obtaining, hated: and missing of their hopes wretched." "If the current of their *Ambition* bee once stopped, like an impetuous torrent, it beates and breakes the banks, growes dangerous, and many times causes inundations. Therefore, Princes respects, if they be fixed upon such natures, are tyed, not

only to a continuation, but service. So that these dispositions should bee avoyded, if discovered, sequestred from imployment, as pernicious and incendiary." Does not this sound very much like the way in which Bacon talks to King James in his essays about certain obnoxious Buckinghams and Somersets? So the Lord Chancellor writes: "Ambition, if it be stopped, cannot have his way, becometh adust, and thereby malign and venomous. So ambitious men, if they finde the way open for their rising, and still get forward, they are rather busy than dangerous; but if they be check't in their desires, they become secretly discontent, and looke upon Men and matters with an Evill Eye; and are best pleased when things goe backward, which is the worst propertie in a Servant of a Prince or State. Therefore, it is good for princes, if they use ambitious men, to handle it so, as they be still retrograde; which because it cannot be without Inconvenience, it is good not to use such natures at all."

The following sentence has, I think, the Baconian ring: "It is a strange insinuating affection, for whosoever is once therewith possessed, neither *Reason,* nor *Impediment,* nor *Impossibility* can stay his mad desires." Our author proceeds to draw illustrations of this from Nebuchadnezzar, "Sylla" and Marius, Pompey and Cæsar. All this is very Baconian, even to the Spelling "Sylla" instead of "Sulla."

Here is a paragraph which shows a fondness for antithesis as great as Bacon's: "It (Ambition) is in a kinde the ape or imitater of *Charity,* said a *Father;* for *Charity* endures all things for *Eternall, Ambition* for *Transitory* happinesse. That is liberall to the poore, this to the rich. The one suffers for *Verity,* the other for *Vanity.* So they both believe all things, and hope for all things, but in a different kinde." Is not a book which contains such gems as this worthy of being reprinted? Yet no edition of it has been issued for three centuries.

The unknown author abhors selfishness and conceit. "It is a dangerous thing for men to love too much, or think too well of themselves. *The Self-lover is the Arch-flatterer.*" This is intensely characteristic of Bacon. No one would call him an ardent lover who read his essay "Of Love," and his words on self-love echo those of our anonymous philosopher. Thus Bacon writes in the essay, "Of Praise": "If he be a cunning Flatterer, he will follow *the Arch-flatterer which is a Man's selfe.*" And again: "There is no such flatterer as is a man's self." And once more in the essay "Of Love": "The Arch-flatterer with whom all the petty flatterers have intelligence, is a man's self."

Two more quotations from the essay must suffice us: "If a man seeke or labour to attain favour, and preferment, with this onely intention, that by that way, he may have better meanes to doe good, to reduce ill Custome to the most ancient and commendable formes, and to amend breaches, or intrusions, or decayes, with particular respect to this, without the least tincture of vaine-glory, or any other selfe-desire, this kind of *Ambition* I admit as a Vertue, and in this case, I allow it to be generous." Was not this the way in which

Bacon ever sought to justify his own ambition? His aim was ever to attain power, that he might use it for the reform of politics, and the advancement of learning. And this is the thought uppermost in the mind of our essayist, for the essay closes with the following paragraph: "To conclude, men that have good aymes and ends in aspiring are not so expressly Votaries to the Publique, as that they bee secluded (by honest and just wayes, free from scandall, importunitié, vexation, and tax), even by the meanes of the present favour, and place they enioy, to raise or encrease their Fortunes, to honor and advance their Posteritie, so it bee done with moderation, and modestie."

In the essay, "Of Detraction," we find more than one passage of such nobility as the following: "They (detractors) are the very moths, that corrupt and canker in every Commonwealth; how they worke, and weare, and eate into every man's good name, experience witnesseth. They bee of a poysonous quality, and devourers of men's reputations, and, therefore, aptly described by the *Psalmist, Their throate is an open Sepulcher, with their tongues have they deceived, the poyson of Asps is under their lips.* A sepulchre, indeede: for men's fames and good reports are in a manner buried in those graves, their deceitfull tongues are the instruments, and the poyson under their lips are materialls, by which so much mischiefe is wrought."

There are many Baconian echoes in the Essay "Of Masters and Servants." Witness, for example, such a sentence as the following:—"In dispatch numbers ever breed confusion, where affaires bee alike, and equally distributed." And again: "In this domination that Masters have over their Servants, two extremes are to be avoided, *Severitie* and *Facilitie*. One makes them to feare, the other, to presume too much. The first, brings them too neere the nature of Bondmen; the second, of Fellowes. This breeds hate, that contempt. But observe the golden mediocritie, both to command, and not be feared, to be familiar and not scorned."

When we come to the essay, "Of Expences," it is again easy to institute a parallel with Bacon's essay on the same topic. The very opening of the essay not only imitates Bacon's style, but repeats a division of expenses which he has made. "Expences," says our author, "doe naturally divide themselves into actions of *Honour, Charity*, and *Necessitie*: the first requires a Great man: the second, a Good man: the third is common to both. Honourable expences bee commendable: Charitable, religious: and Necessarie, forced. The first addes respects: the second, love: and the last, shewes our human frailty. Inaptitude to the former, shewes a man to be of a poore and ignoble spirit: backwardnesse in the next, expresseth an Atheisticall, and heathenish nature: and not promptnesse to the third, argues a most perverse and covetous disposition." Bacon's essay opens with this declaration: "Riches are for spending; and spending for honour and good actions." Here we have two of the three divisions above—Honor and Charity—and the third division, Necessity, is treated soon after under the name of Ordinary Ex-

penses. Listen, now, to the opening of Bacon's essay, "Of Studies": "Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chiefe use, for delight, is in privatenesse and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of businesse." And soon after—"To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humour of a scholler." And so on. Both writers, then, if there are two, are fond of this same three-fold construction, which adds such force and compactness to an aphorism. The subject of Bacon's essay is well summed up in the following sentence from the "Horae Subsecivae": "Expences should ever be limited according to the occasion, and our own ability."

Scarcely equalled by the "Essay of Ambition," the anonymous author's thoughts on Death form the noblest essay in the volume. Listen to the opening majestic paragraph: "Nothing is more certain than Death, and nothing more uncertain than the time. Every man is to pay this debt, though few be ready at the day; life is but lent us and the condition of the obligation is Death, yet not without a penalty, if in this wandering and uncertain state we make no preparation."

The following paragraph has a Baconian echo: "A man's peregrination in this life should be employed, but as a harbinger for Death, nay, rather, life; whilst we live, we die; but live not till death. Yet, good men may in a sort, religiously fear death, in respect of the cause of it. For the wages of sinne is death. In respect of not knowing the place of our being after death (we, ourselves, being altogether unmeriting) these, and the like considerations, may justly make death seem terrible." Does not this remind us of the opening of Bacon's "Essay of Death"? "Certainly, the contemplation of death, as the wages of sin and passage to another world, is holy and religious." But, of course, this resemblance must not be pushed too far.

The extraordinary likeness of the close of this Essay "Of Death" to Bacon's style warrants a quotation otherwise a trifle long: "Many men without the knowledge of Religion, have excellently expressed their contempt of Death, but that may be reduced to some of these causes; peradventure they had a kind of uncertain opinion that some greater happiness followed, than accompanied this life; or in respect of the daily examples of their mortalitie, custome extinguished fear; or lastly, to perpetuate their memories, or publish their fame to succeeding ages, have for the liberation of their Country, or Friends, or Honour, voluntarily exposed themselves to a certaine and present death."

One passage in the "Essay of a Country Life" reproduces the spirit of Bacon's "Essay of Factions." "He is chiefly to take heed, that when factions be sided, his Greatness uphold not one faction, to the decay and ruin of the other; but contrarily to even and compound them in mutual amity and agreement." So Bacon writes: "Great men, that have strength in themselves, were better to main-

tain themselves indifferent and neutral." I have not space here to go into a detailed analysis of this Essay, but such an analysis would show many similarities in thought and expression between the two (?) authors.

Such a passage as the following from the Essay "Of Religion" shows a use of anecdote very like Bacon's: "And let no man persuade himself, that there is any action, or virtue, comparatively, in this world of equal estimation and power with Religion. It was the commendation Saint Ambrose gave the Emperor Theodosius, that upon his deathbed, and in extremity of weakness, he took more care for the state of the Church and preservation of Religion, than of his own extreme dangers and infirmities. And Justinian, in the preface of his laws, disclaimed all confidence in the greatness of his Empire, numbers of Soldiers, advice of his Chief Commanders and Council, but relied only upon that providence and mercy of God, which Religion had taught him; knowing the neglect of this duty would otherwise awake God's Justice and wrath: according to Horace: *Dii multa neglecti dederunt Hesperiae mala luctuosae.*"

"Innovations in Religion commonly precedes alteration in Government." So says our anonymous author, and Bacon agrees with him. The Essay "Of Religion" closes with a small piece of casuistry eminently Baconian:—"It is better for a time to force men to outward conformity, though mixt with hypocrisy, than suffer them to continue refractory."

The following curious division of History is found likewise in the "Advancement of Learning." "Of Histories some are Natural, some Civil; of Civil, some concern the state of the Church, and some the affairs of the Commonwealth. To them both appertaineth the history of places, which is Geography; of times, which is Chronology; of descents, which is Genealogy; and of actions, which is that I now am to speak of, and is principally, singly, and by a kind of prerogative, called History." Bacon makes at first a four-fold division of history,—natural, civil, ecclesiastical, and literary,—and later adds to this division, history of cosmography. His main division of history, however, into natural and civil coincides with that of the "Horae Subsecivae."

This paragraph could have been penned by no other than Bacon. "The benefit that the understanding receiveth thence (i. e., from reading history) ariseth two wayes. First, it becomes informed, as it were, with matter of fact, by the direct narration of things past, in manner as they fell out. And in this respect, History is said to be, *Testis temporum, lux veritatis, nuntia vetustatis.* Secondly, it is enabled by particular examples, and by the events of humane counsell (as by so many rules and patterns), to take the wisest course in conducting our affaires to their right ends. And for this effect, it is called *Magistra vitae.*"

Of the four discourses which form the second half of the volume, I shall have little to say. "The Discourse Upon the Beginning of Tacitus" has Baconian echoes, but does not reach the same standard as the rest of the book. Of "The Discourse of Rome,"

one or two words are necessary. The discourse shows clearly that the writer has been in Rome, and this fact forms the chief objection to my plea for the book's Baconian authorship. The life of Bacon, as we know it, gives no indication that he was ever in Italy. But we do know that he was abroad, and that while abroad he met M. de Montaigne. Now the reader of Montaigne's Journal of his Travels in Italy will recall that Montaigne was accompanied by a mysterious M. d'Estissac, whose identity has never been ascertained. Yet he must have been a young man of consequence, for when the two were admitted to a private audience with the Pope, M. d'Estissac entered the presence first, and would seem to have been the man whom the Pope wished most to see. May not this have been our young friend Francis Bacon? Perhaps the following passages from "The Discourse of Rome" may prove illuminating. "I do not think it unnecessary to say something of the safety and danger for an Englishman to travel thither. . . . For some persons there can be no place in the world so dangerous for them to come in, as this. . . . Therefore, the safest course for such a one, is . . . neither to make himself, nor intention known to anybody living, for then there may be a possibility of discovery. And besides, it is necessary *that he have some other Language besides his own, that he may pass for that Country-man* . . . Those times of public hostility, as in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, when the Pope thundered excommunications, and professed himself an open enemy to the State, as he did then, it is dangerous." I do not wish to push this suggestion too far, but the conditions seem to answer to the case satisfactorily. It would be an interesting task to compare this discourse with Bacon's essay "Of Travel," and to see how closely it is modelled upon it, but I must content myself with a bare indication of the fact. As for the "Discourse against Flatterie," a remarkable parallel might be instituted with the essays, and so also in the case of the "Discourse of Laws." I shall feel contented, however, if I have suggested the likeness, and shall rest my case on the evidence which I have adduced.

To sum up, the anonymous author of "Horae Subsecivae," and Francis Bacon have many points in common. The style of both is extremely concise. The works of both are notable for clear analysis and arrangement. Both employ rich imagery and striking illustrations. Both show great sagacity and knowledge of human nature. Biblical and classical quotations are frequent in both, and generally inaccurate. Both use obscure Latin derivatives, are fond of balance, antithesis, and what, for want of a better name, may be called, the rule of three. Both are eloquent and of lofty, intellectual elevation. Both look upon life from the same standpoint, and treat of its same aspects. Both are men of rank, and both excuse ambition if its object be the reform of politics and the advancement of learning. Finally, both have written great books, books that deserve to live. What more shall I say? Simply that this article is a proof and a plea—a proof of the book's authorship and a plea for the book's recognition.

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